



**GEORGE MASON MEMORIAL
FOUNTAIN FOUR**

West Potomac Park, East of Inlet Bridge over Tidal Basin

Report to the National Park Service

July 6, 2000

Abstract

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents, submits final site and building plans for the George Mason Memorial. In 1990 the Board of Regents was authorized by Congress to establish a memorial to George Mason. The design draws from the original garden design of the site, which included the fountain and trellis elements.

Authority

Public Law 101-358, P.L. 102-277 and P.L. 99-652.

Commission Action

The Commission **approves** the final site and building plans for the George Mason Memorial, Fountain Four, West Potomac Park, east of the Inlet Bridge over the Tidal Basin, as shown on NCPC Map File No. 1.43(73.10)-40804.

* * *

BACKGROUND AND STAFF EVALUATION

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSAL

The National Park Service, on behalf of the Gunston Hall Board of Regents submits final site and building plans for the George Mason Memorial. George Mason was a Virginia patriot and colleague of George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. His 1776 Virginia Declaration of Rights was the basis for the writing of the Bill of Rights of the United States Constitution. The construction of the memorial will provide for the renovation of one of Washington's intimate designed historic landscapes near the Jefferson Memorial. Historic layouts and photographs were used as the basis for the design with an objective of providing a modest and contemplative environment.

Site

- The site, near the Jefferson Memorial in West Potomac Park, is referred to as Fountain Four. It is bounded by Ohio Drive, SW on the north and west, and generally bounded by the George Mason Memorial Bridge and its approach lanes on the south and east. The existing fountain feature is a remnant of the early development of West Potomac Park. By 1905, the area was improved by the construction of Fountains 1, 2, 3, and 4. Fountains 1, 2, and 3 were demolished in 1947 for the construction of the 14th Street Bridges across the Potomac River.
- In addition to Fountain Four, the site contains planting beds, walkways, and rows of shrubs formally arranged in a circular pattern. The site is enclosed by a hedge, which is surrounded by a backdrop of various trees and shrubs.
- The existing fountain is drained during the winter months to prevent ice damage and to allow for the cleaning and maintenance of the pool bottom.

Design

- The design for the memorial is set within the context of the existing garden and pool. The entrance to the garden will be enhanced with a low curb wall inscribed with text that introduces the memorial.
- The principal memorial element is a slightly larger-than-life-size sculpture of George Mason. This element is in a sitting position on a bench located beneath a 9-foot-high by 72-foot-long semi-circular trellis. The portion of trellis that is above the sculpture of George Mason is slightly higher by approximately 1½ feet to provide emphasis to the sculptural element. The trellis will be set on axis to the garden entrance and will be located to the rear of the garden against the support slope for the roadway leading to the George Mason Memorial Bridge.

- Two four-foot, nine-inch-high limestone inscription walls will flank the sculpture of George Mason. Each of these walls will be approximately nine feet in length. Both the sculpture and inscription walls will be located on a paved platform underneath the trellis.
- The stone walls will be inscribed with text related to George Mason and the central space within these walls will contain a niche where the life-size figurative sculpture is to be located.
- Existing walkways within the site will be renovated and enhanced with new natural stone paving.
- Additional seating will be placed within the garden and under the trellis and plantings will be added at the back of the memorial on the slope embankment to the George Mason Memorial Bridge.
- Supplemental plantings will also be added to complement the existing plantings surrounding the garden and pool.
- Minor alterations to the fountain will be accomplished to improve operational efficiency and enhance the aesthetics of the pool. Low bubblers will replace the existing tall waterspout.
- Beyond the existing Washington Globe fixtures currently in the garden, additional lighting will be included in the trellis above the principal memorial elements (sculpture and inscription walls).

All of the above actions are intended to memorialize George Mason as well as enhance the existing garden.

PREVIOUS COMMISSION ACTION

The Commission reviewed and approved the preliminary site and building plans at its May 4, 2000 meeting.

CONSULTATION

The applicant has consulted with Commission staff, as well as the staffs of the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office and the Commission of Fine Arts, throughout the development of the project.

EVALUATION

Staff recommends approval of the final site and building plans for the memorial. These plans are consistent with the design concept and the preliminary site and building plans previously approved by the Commission. The final plans represent a refinement and evolution of the previous plans.

The final plans do, however, include a proposal for additional lighting only in the area of the principal memorial elements (sculpture and inscription walls). Specifically, lighting will be provided in the trellis above the sculpture and inscription walls to highlight this area. Staff fully concurs with the idea of lighting this area. The Park Service advises that the intensity of light in this area will be subdued so that it does not detract from the nearby Jefferson Memorial.

COORDINATION

Coordinating Committee

The Coordinating Committee reviewed this item at its meeting on June 14, 2000, and forwarded the proposal to the Commission with the statement that the project has been coordinated with all agencies participating. The participating agencies were NCPC; the District of Columbia Office of Planning; the Fire Department; the Department of Housing and Community Development; the General Services Administration; the National Park Service; and the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority.

Commission of Fine Arts

At its June 15, 2000 meeting, the Commission of Fine Arts approved the final site and building plans.

Federal Capital Improvements Program

This project is not included in the Federal Capital Improvements Program, Fiscal Years 2000 – 2004, adopted by the Commission on July 1, 1999.

CONFORMANCE

Comprehensive Plan

The location of the proposed memorial is designated for Monumental and Decorative Areas and Parks in the Parks, Open Space and Natural Features Element of the Comprehensive Plan and is consistent with an applicable policy in this element, which specifies:

Monumental and Decorative Parks...should serve as settings to enhance public buildings, monuments and memorials; as such, their fundamental integrity should be protected.

Additional policies contained in the Federal Facilities Element also apply:

The adaptation and refinement processes necessary to complete the central portion of the Monumental Core as a fine work of civic art should be continued in the development of individual project proposals within the existing basic form and framework.

New memorials to be located in the L'Enfant City and environs should be carefully sited to refine and complete the L'Enfant and McMillan Plans so far as possible.

The final site and building plans are consistent with these policies.

National Environmental Policy Act

In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Park Service (NPS) completed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the memorial on October 13, 1999. Overall, the site contains no major environmental constraints. No wetlands exist at the site and no threatened or endangered species exist in the project area. The memorial would not generate significant traffic, noise, or air quality impacts.

Stormwater and floodplain effects from the new memorial design will not be significant. The memorial design is primarily an open landscape feature with only minor site elements that will be constructed to withstand flooding effects. No substantial earth grading or other ground surface modifications will occur in the project to impact the existing floodplain storage area. NPS has identified the memorial development as an excepted action under its compliance procedures for floodplain review in accordance with Executive Order 11988. The FONSI serves to inform the public of the NPS determination.

Onsite stormwater presently is discharged into the Potomac River through an established storm drainage system that will be maintained in the new development. Because only minor amounts of new impervious pavement are provided in the new memorial design, no significant effect is derived from those improvements. Subsurface drainage will primarily relate to the establishment of plant growth and new structures in the memorial design (minor retaining walls, sidewalks, and trellis structure) and will be provided by an underdrain system connected to the storm drains. No additional utilities are proposed; consequently, ground disturbance and erosion control will be confined to the immediate boundaries of the memorial site. Erosion control measures will be implemented during memorial construction.

National Historic Preservation Act

The National Park Service has completed its Section 106 responsibilities, determining that the construction of the memorial would have no adverse effect on those qualities of West Potomac Park that qualify it for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

























